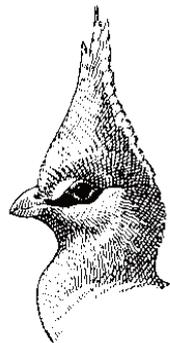


**Ornithological expedition to
southern Bénin, April 2011**

Françoise Dowsett-Lemaire & Robert J. Dowsett





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Résumé

Ceci est notre deuxième visite au sud du Bénin, faisant suite à une première expédition pendant la saison sèche de 2009. Le mois d'avril 2011 a été partagé entre les forêts principales du sud (Lama, Niaouli), les forêts plus sèches ou forêts claires des Monts Kouffé et Tobé à l'ouest, les plaines marécageuses du Zou et du Sô, et la zone côtière (Pahou et Grand-Popo). Un séjour du 12 au 16 avril à la limite sud des Monts Kouffé et dans la zone protégée de Tobé (Bantè) a permis d'étendre l'aire de distribution de plusieurs espèces forestières ou de savane, notamment du rare Aigle couronné *Stephanoaetus coronatus* (un ex. essayant de capturer un Daman des rochers sur le rocher de Tobé), du Râle perlé *Sarothrura pulchra* (un chanteur à Tobé, limite nord actuelle), de l'Oedicnème tachard *Burhinus capensis* (Tobé, limite sud actuelle), Malcoha à bec jaune *Ceuthmochares aereus* (Tobé & Kouffé, limite nord), Coucal à ventre blanc *Centropus leucogaster* (Tobé & Kouffé, limite nord), Grand-duc de Verreaux *Bubo lacteus* (Kouffé), Trogon narina *Apaloderma narina* (Kouffé), Calao rieur *Bycanistes fistulator* (commun aux deux sites), Bulbul de Baumann *Phyllastrephus baumanni* (commun en sous-bois dense à Tobé, limite nord d'une espèce découverte à la Lama en 2009), Bulbul fourmilier *Bleda canicapillus* (Tobé & Kouffé, limite nord), Rougegorge de forêt *Stiphornis erythrothorax* (Tobé, limite nord), Crombec vert *Sylvietta virens* (Tobé & Kouffé, limite nord) et Hylia verte *Hylia prasina* (Tobé, limite nord), Cisticole rousse *Cisticola rufus* (commune à Kouffé, limite sud), Cisticole des rochers *Cisticola aberrans* (rocher de Tobé, limite sud), Tchitrec à ventre roux *Terpsiphone rufiventer* (Kouffé, limite nord) et Akalat de Puvel *Illadopsis puveli* (un chanteur à Tobé, limite nord). La Forêt Classée des Monts Kouffé a encore de très belles forêts claires et fragments de forêts sèches, mais elle est en train de se faire dilapider par des braconniers en tous genres. La forêt sèche de Tobé (c. 800 ha), qui jouxte la Forêt Classée d'Agoua, est pour l'instant dans un bien meilleur état de protection que cette dernière, grâce aux efforts d'Alain Ratié.

Notre première et courte visite de la forêt côtière de Pahou le 10 avril a révélé la présence de plusieurs couples du Cubla à gros bec *Dryoscopus sabini* (connu jusqu'ici seulement du petit noyau central de Niaouli), du Drongo de Ludwig *Dicrurus ludwigii* et du Bulbul à queue rousse *Phyllastrephus scandens*, deux espèces absentes des forêts principales du sud. A Grand-Popo (28-29 avril), le rare Pic tacheté *Campethera nivosa* a été vu dans un fourré, et au moins deux mâles de Combassou de Wilson *Vidua wilsoni* étaient en plumage nuptial, en compagnie d'Amarantes pointés *Lagonosticta rufopicta* (l'espèce hôte).

Les forêts de Niaouli (10-11 et 18-21 avril) et de la Lama (21-27 avril) ont été revisitées dans l'espoir de déceler plus d'espèces qu'en saison sèche. De fait, l'activité vocale en général était plus importante à la Lama, avec notamment tous les coucous en activité, et quelques Pigeons à nuque bronzée *Columba iriditorques* (aussi entendu à Niaouli). Mais il sera nécessaire de revisiter en saison des pluies pour compléter les recensements. Un Anomalospize parasite *Anomalospiza imberbis* en plumage internuptial a été identifié dans la plaine du Zou à Domè (17 avril), une confirmation pour le Bénin.

Avril est un mois de passage intensif pour beaucoup de migrants. On a observé entre autres plusieurs groupes de Faucons kobez *Falco vespertinus* du 11 au 15 avril (avec jusqu'à une centaine d'individus au crépuscule autour du rocher de Tobé le 14); plusieurs Coucous gris *Cuculus canorus* du 13 au 26 avril; un important passage de Guépriers d'Europe *Merops apiaster* (jusqu'à des milliers par jour à la mi-avril), se terminant le 19 avril à Niaouli; les derniers Guépriers roses *Merops malimbicus* (deux) quittant Niaouli vers l'est le 10 avril; des groupes de Guépriers à gorge blanche *Merops albicollis* commençant la migration vers le nord au-dessus de Kouffé et Tobé les 13 et 16 avril; des Martinets marbrés *Tachymarptis aequatorialis* passant en nombres vers le nord ou le nord-ouest du 12 avril (Agbon, Kouffé) au 19 (Niaouli), souvent par groupes d'environ 50. Des nombres exceptionnels de Pouillots siffleurs *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* ont fait escale dans les forêts claires ou sèches de Kouffé/Tobé du 13 au 16 avril.

En ce qui concerne les mammifères, le site de Tobé est d'un intérêt particulier puisqu'il abrite les deux espèces de daman, le Daman des rochers sur la colline granitique (*Procavia ruficeps kerstingi*) et le Daman forestier *Dendrohyrax* sp., une espèce à la voix très caractéristique qui a aussi été entendue le long de la rivière

Adjiro aux Monts Kouffé. Ce Daman est endémique au couloir dahoméen, de l'est du Ghana au sud-ouest du Nigeria; le Daman des arbres *D. dorsalis*, dont la voix est très différente, n'existe pas au Bénin.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a complement to the one we produced in 2009 (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2009). In 2011 we spent nearly four weeks in the country, from 4-29 April. The main purpose of this visit was to spend more time in the forests of Niaouli and Lama, in the hope of locating or confirming some species additional to those found in February (2009), as the breeding season should have been more advanced. The rest of our time was shared between the coastal area, at Drabo Gbo (Ouèga), with a first visit to Pahou forest (near Ouidah) and Grand-Popo; the Sô floodplain at Zinvié/Takli and Zou floodplain near Domè; and an area of (transition) woodland and dry forest in the west, in Monts Kouffé and Tobé farm near Banté. On 28 April a meeting was held at the residence of the Dutch ambassador to discuss the future of ornithological work in the country.

Unlike the earlier report, we do not, this time, present a full annotated list, except for some areas visited for the first time (Monts Kouffé and Tobé, Pahou forest, Grand-Popo). We are more selective concerning the forests of Niaouli and Lama already well documented in 2009.

ITINERARY AND TIMETABLE

- 4 Apr 2011: we entered the country at the border post of Tohoun, and spent the night at Abomey ("Chez Monique", recommended for its cheap and quiet rooms).
- 5 Apr: reached Drabo Gbo in the evening, and spent three nights there, at the invitation of Peter Neuenchwander. Visited the small forests at Drabo Gbo and the insect collections at the IITA (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture) at Abomey-Calavi.
- 8 Apr: evening at Zinvié marsh, night at the rest house of the NGO running the Sitatunga Reserve and fish farm. Morning of 9 Apr around Zinvié, Lanzron forest and Takli floodplain, with Peter and Pierre Gauzère, a French student with an interest in birds and who was undertaking a short research project.
- 9 Apr: night in Ouidah, in order to spend the first hours of the morning (of 10th) in Pahou forest, with Bruno Portier.
- 10-11 Apr: night and a few hours in Niaouli forest.
- 11: drive north to Savalou for the night.
- 12-14 Apr: two nights camping on the edge of the "Forêt Classée des Monts Kouffé" just north of the village of Banon. Walks into the reserve.
- 14-16 Apr: two nights camping at Tobé farm, property of Alain Ratié. An area of some 800 ha of protected dry forest and transition woodland.
- 16 Apr: afternoon drive to Abomey, evening there with Bruno Portier and Dutch ambassador Wouter Plomp.
- 17 Apr: morning walk with Bruno and Wouter in Zou floodplain at Domè; lunch in Abomey, afternoon drive with Bruno to Gbègon to see what is left of forest habitat in that region. Night in Abomey.
- 18 Apr: E-mails in Bohicon. Drive to Niaouli, arriving at 16h30.
- 18-21 Apr: three days in Niaouli, mostly in the plateau forest; the bas-fond being visited evening of 19th and morning of 20th.
- 21 Apr: midday drive to Lama, camp established opposite layon 15 at entrance of teak plantation.
- 21-27 Apr: six full days in the Lama, being joined by Johannes Merz on the 22nd. RJD set up a few mistnets on layons 15 then 12. Observations on layons 15, 12, 11, along the main road at swampy places, and on the firebreak.
- 27 Apr: drive to Cotonou for the night.
- 28 Apr: meeting at the Dutch Ambassador's residence; afternoon drive to Grand-Popo (Auberge).
- 28-29 Apr: observations around the Auberge de Grand-Popo, mouth of Mono river, grassland and thickets behind the hotel.
- 29 Apr: left Bénin a day ahead of schedule, as the border was going to be closed on the 30th because of the elections. Border crossing at Aného was a pure formality.

Weather conditions. Although first storms in the south are normally experienced in February-March, there was little rain in April: a night storm on 10/11 on the coast (Ouidah-Pahou), which reached Niaouli (Innocent Sossa pers comm.); a night storm in Kouffé/Tobé on 13/14; a big storm on the afternoon of 17th, between Bohicon and Kétou (which reached Niaouli again); a brief shower in the Lama on 25 Apr was all there was there in a week; an evening storm at Grand-Popo on the 28th.

OBSERVATIONS

1. From Savalou to Monts Kouffé

After the night in Savalou, we stopped for breakfast at a small dam north of **Agbon**, west of the main road. Drove on to Bantè (poste forestier, which we informed of our intention) and on to Banon. At Banon, a villager came with us to show us the track to the edge of the reserve of **Monts Kouffé**, as some other tracks lead to farms etc. The track was too bad for our vehicle to reach the boundary, so we stopped about 500 m before, in tall woodland. Inside the reserve this track splits into several branches, with a main one going north. It is used entirely by illegal farmers and poachers on motorbikes and lorries.

The road from Banon to the reserve crosses many cashew farms, that seem to have replaced dry *Anogeissus* forest (there are some remnants). The reserve's boundary follows the Adjiro river which, in April, was not flowing but formed large pools in the shade of riparian forest (*Cynometra megalophylla* 20-25 m high is dominant, with one or two big *Ceiba pentandra*, *Kigelia africana*, *Lonchocarpus sericeus*, *Manilkara multinervis*, *Pterocarpus santalinoides* edge of rocky pools, *Raphia* sp (*sudanica*?...)). The woodland occurs in large patches, mainly on ridges. It is quite rich, with *Daniellia oliveri* and *Vitellaria paradoxa* both important large trees (20-25 m), and also *Azelia africana*, *Bombax costatum*, *Burkea africana*, *Combretum* spp., *Cussonia arborea*, *Ficus ingens*, *F. platyphylla*, *Lannea barteri*, *Prosopis africana*, *Pseudocedrela kotschyi*, *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Syzygium guineense*, *Terminalia laxiflora* and others, *Uapaca togoensis*. *Anogeissus leiocarpus* is also common, being scattered in woodland but becoming dominant in hollows and behind riparian forest, with also *Acacia polyacantha*, *Bombax*, *Tamarindus indica* etc. About one km north of the river crossing, the main road branches with the right fork leading to a patch of richer forest in the process of being cut down by poachers: a big *Khaya* had been cut for planks, now apparently abandoned, other large trees were *Ceiba*, *Cola gigantea* (several being cut), *Dialium guineense*, *Manilkara multinervis*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Ricinidendron heudelotii* etc. In woodland, *Pterocarpus erinaceus* is the main victim of loggers. *Isoberlinia* spp. may already have been extirpated.

We saw dozens of poachers on motorbikes coming in and out of the reserve all day long; some carried guns (shots were heard) and others chain-saws, axes etc. The sound of chain-saws was continuous. One large lorry came out, with 7-8 people on board; it was apparently full of logs. Two forest guards went in on the morning of 14 Apr, confiscated a motorbike and a chain-saw. Guards appear to be very selective in what they do, and we understand that most of the "poachers" have the support of Forestry, those arrested being only those who had not obtained (paid) their permits from officials. Poaching of wood and animals in the reserve could be controlled with political willpower, but this is lacking. For the moment the level of poaching is extremely worrying.

The **Tobé farm** is protected privately, by Alain Ratié and his collaborators. It is 6 km south of the village of Koko, itself a few km south-west of Banté. Villagers at Koko (and especially Alain's collaborator Noël) can advise visitors on the route from there to Tobé. The property consists of some 800 ha of transition woodland (woodland returning in part to dry forest), with some riparian forest on a spring below Tobé rock (a round granite hill) and along a stream (the Zou) forming the southern boundary with Agoua forest. The houses and rest camp are built at the base of the rocky hill, which affords wonderful views over the forest. The "Forêt Classée d'Agoua" is on the other side of the Zou but is being eaten into by logging and numerous illegal farms, although some semi-intact forest remains in the southern section (A. Ratié pers. comm.).

It is obvious from the hill that *Anogeissus* is the commonest tree locally. Woodland trees such as *Burkea africana*, *Combretum* spp., *Daniellia oliveri*, *Entada* sp., *Ficus platyphylla*, *Gardenia ternifolia*, *Hymenocardia acida*, *Lannea acida*, *L. barteri*, *Lophira lanceolata*, *Maranthes polyandra*, *Parinari curatellifolia*, *Piliostigma thonningii*, *Pseudocedrela kotschyi*, *Pteleopsis suberosa*, *Pterocarpus erinaceus*, *Terminalia* spp., *Vitellaria paradoxa* etc. are being invaded by *Chromolaena odorata* and saplings of forest trees such as *Cola gigantea* and

Erythrophleum suaveolens. Some sections of riparian forest (along the Zou) are quite luxuriant, with big *Khaya*, *Antiaris toxicaria*, *Berlinia grandiflora*, *Cynometra megalophylla*, *Erythrophleum suaveolens* (of enormous size), *Milicia excelsa*; *Diospyros mespiliformis* and *Manilkara multinervis* are occasional. *Pouteria* (ex-*Malacantha*) *alnifolia* is a common medium-sized tree; palms include *Elaeis* and *Borassus*. Strangling figs near the river belong to *Ficus vogelii* and there are many lianes, including *Entada*.

Annotated bird list

("Both sites" means both Kouffé and Tobé)

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. At least two on the Adjiro stream (dusk), Kouffé.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. At Banté.

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*. A few in riparian forest, both sites; dam near Agbon.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. One at Tobé.

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*. On the Adjiro (Kouffé).

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*. A few at the dam near Agbon.

African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*. One pair Kouffé. Likely to occur also at Tobé, where its song was imitated by the Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. A pair on the main road north of Savalou.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migrans*. Some near Banté.

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*. Immatures seen both sites.

Western Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens*. Song heard between the Kouffé reserve and Banon, 13h00 on 14 Apr.

African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*. Seen and heard (early morning song) at Tobé. One chased by a Piping Hornbill, and another by an Olive Sunbird!

Shikra *Accipiter badius*. In Kouffé, and dam near Agbon.

Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis*. One flying north over Kouffé, 13 Apr. One on the track in Tobé 14 Apr.

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*. Widespread (and noisy), both sites, Agbon etc.

Red-necked Buzzard *Buteo auguralis*. One in Kouffé, calling.

African Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster*. One between Agoua and Banté.

Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*. In the early morning of 15 Apr one attempted to catch a Rock Hyrax (*Procavia*) on the hill at Tobé but failed, and landed on the rock just below a family of about six very watchful (and noisy) hyraxes. It then took off in the direction of Agoua forest.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*. One in Koko village, 16 Apr (African race).

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*. After counting a group of c. 30 birds flycatching over a teak plantation near Dan on 11 Apr, more were seen around Tobé rock on 14-15 Apr. About 100, in three different groups, were flycatching in late evening all around the rock and the tree crowns until it got so dark that we could barely distinguish them (they were still active). They must have spent the night locally. The next day (15 Apr) we saw just 4.

Double-spurred Francolin *Francolinus bicalcaratus*. In fields and woodland, both sites and vicinity.

Ahanta Francolin *Francolinus ahantensis*. In thickets and riparian forest, both sites.

Stone Partridge *Ptilopachus petrosus*. Local in Kouffé (e.g. near the Adjiro); several on the Tobé hill.

[Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*. Still present in Kouffé forest/woodland (according to local hunter), and possibly also Crested Guineafowl *Guttera pucherani*]

White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra*. One singing in forest on the spring below Tobé rock. The amount of singing, day and night, suggests that this bird was unmated.

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*. One seen on a pool in the shaded stream at Tobé.

African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*. A few on the dam near Agbon.

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*. Singing in *Anogeissus* forest (with clear understorey) near the rest camp at Tobé, just after dark, 14 Apr.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*. Around villages and farms on the main road, not in the reserves.

- Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*. Common in transition woodland, riparian forest, both sites, and elsewhere.
- Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus*. One seen in woodland in Kouffé.
- Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer*. A few both sites.
- African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus*. Both sites, some at fruits of *Manilkara*.
- Senegal Parrot *Poicephalus senegallus*. Some in Kouffé (*Anogeissus*).
- Green Turaco *Tauraco persa*. Widespread, in forest and transition woodland, both sites. At fruits of *Lannea barteri*.
- Violet Turaco *Musophaga violacea*. Widespread, both sites. The song of Violet Turaco often induced Green Turacos to respond.
- Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii*. One at Tobé, singing briefly on morning of 16 Apr, was probably a migrant.
- Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*. One singing (9h00) in big patch of tall forest north-east of Adjiro river in Kouffé, 14 Apr.
- Common (European Grey) Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Three near Agbon (wooded grassland near the dam) on 12 Apr, including a rufous female. One on 13 Apr in Kouffé.
- African Grey Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis*. Apparently rare in Kouffé (as also was its potential horst the Fork-tailed Drongo), with just one singing a little on 14 Apr.
- Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas*. Both sites (forest), but not singing much.
- Yellowbill (Green Coucal or Malcoha) *Ceuthmochares aereus*. Widespread in forest and thickets, both sites.
- Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster*. Heard on the Adjiro (Kouffé), and also in forest at Tobé (several).
- Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*. Widespread, woodland and scrub.
- Barn Owl *Tyto alba*. Heard at Tobé.
- African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis*. Several in Kouffé, starting to sing just before dusk (19h00). One very distant at Tobé (heard from hill).
- Northern White-faced Owl *Ptilopsis leucotis*. Woodland or edge of riparian in Kouffé, singing on one of two nights.
- Spotted (Greyish) Eagle Owl *Bubo africanus cinerascens*. One pair around the Tobé rock, quite noisy.
- Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus*. Two singing by day (9h00) in the tall patch of forest north-east of the Adjiro, Kouffé.
- Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatum*. A noisy pair in Kouffé.
- Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii*. Heard in forest at both sites.
- Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis nigriscapularis*. This is late in the season for this species (which stops singing in March or April for a few months), but one was heard distantly in Kouffé (edge of riparian) and briefly at Tobé (at 22h, 14 Apr).
- Freckled Nightjar *Caprimulgus tristigma*. A very noisy one on Tobé rock.
- Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus*. A pair much in evidence around the grassland on Tobé rock.
- Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri*. One at the dam near Agbon.
- African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*. A few around Agbon, and near dam on the river at Tobé.
- Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis*. This migrant (breeding in the Sahel) was present in large numbers at this time of year. About 50 (calling) in a group high over the dam near Agbon, 12 Apr. Over 20 flying over Kouffé, 13 Apr. Some flying over Tobé rock on 14th. Passage continued over Niaouli forest later in the month. Often flying in a north-westerly direction.
- Common (European) Swift *Apus apus*. Passing regularly on most days, some calling.
- ?Pallid Swift *Apus ?pallidus*. At least 6 birds (with rasping calls) flying in a north-westerly direction over Tobé rock, 15 Apr.
- Little Swift *Apus affinis*. Around towns, rocky hills (many at Banté), Tobé rock, even two over Kouffé.
- African White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer*. One pair at a culvert near Agoua.
- Narina's Trogon *Apaloderma narina*. One seen in a party just outside the Adjiro riparian forest (in *Anogeissus* and *Tamarindus*) on 13 Apr. One singing briefly in riparian thicket on the 14th, after rain (Kouffé).
- Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadibrachys*. One on the Adjiro river, in deep shade.

- Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*. At dam near Algon, and on the Adjiro (Kouffé), at pools.
- African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ceyx pictus*. Widespread, both sites.
- Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*. Common both sites (forest).
- Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*. At the dam near Agbon.
- Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti*. One singing at dawn, Kouffé (woodland).
- Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maxima*. Recorded both sites (rocky pools on the river).
- White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis*. Kouffé: a flock of c. 40 birds flying late evening on 13 Apr, presumably searching for a roosting tree. Came back even faster after a few minutes, still looking. Some passing over Tobé on 16 Apr. Thus spring passage seemed to have started.
- European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Active passage north on a daily basis, everywhere, starting some time in the morning, once (15 Apr) as early as 7h30 (dawn is at 6h20). Call constantly, not always visible.
- Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*. One in a farm near Banon, 14 Apr.
- Rufous-crowned (Purple) Roller *Coracias naevius*. One calling in woodland in Kouffé.
- Blue-bellied Roller *Coracias cyanogaster*. One pair in a clearing in a cashew farm near Koko.
- Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*. One pair on the road south of Agbon; one pair (silent) flycatching at a hatch of flying ants in Kouffé (silent, 14 Apr). Not noticed at Tobé.
- African Pied Hornbill *Tockus fasciatus*. A few both sites.
- African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus*. A few both sites; seen taking fruits of *Lannea barteri*.
- Piping Hornbill *Bycanistes fistulator*. Remarkably common in Monts Kouffé (groups of up to 8-10 birds), and also at Tobé. In riparian forest but also in transition woodland. Seen flycatching (at a hatch of flying ants) and taking fruit of *Lannea barteri*.
- Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus*. Common in Kouffé, rarer at Tobé.
- Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus*. Curiously only at Tobé (several).
- Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator*. One singing a little in Kouffé.
- Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor*. Tobé: one singing near rest camp, from 9h20, throughout the day but with resting periods until 18h, in several tall trees.
- Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae*. Both sites, in riparian; also near dam (Agbon).
- Mosque Swallow *Hirundo senegalensis*. A pair at the dam near Agbon.
- Lesser Striped Swallow *Hirundo abyssinica*. Pair at dam near Agbon, also just outside Tobé farm, along culverts.
- Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*. At least two at dam near Agbon, race? (12 Apr).
- Preuss's Cliff Swallow *Hirundo preussi*. Some at dam near Agbon, 12 Apr.
- Barn (European) Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Widespread in the area, on passage.
- House Martin *Delichon urbicum*. Some passing daily over Kouffé and Tobé etc.
- Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*. One in woodland, Kouffé, 14 Apr.
- Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Campephaga phoenicea*. Kouffé: one male calling in *Anogeissus*.
- White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina pectoralis*. Kouffé: seen in two places in woodland, one flying to and fro as if collecting food for a nest (13 Apr).
- Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*. Kouffé: forest on the Adjiro stream. More widespread at Tobé, including in transition woodland.
- Leaflove *Pyrhurus scandens*. Common in Kouffé along the Adjiro, and also in the patch north-east of the river. Tobé: a few pairs in riparian forest.
- Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*. Unexpectedly common at Tobé, in riparian forest at the spring, but also everywhere in transition woodland, in low thickets. Located entirely by its early morning song.
- Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda caniucaapilla*. In Kouffé discovered in the tall patch of forest north-east of the river. Tobé: in riparian forest.
- Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*. Throughout.
- Western Nicator *Nicator chloris*. Common in riparian forest and transition woodland, both sites, and also in farmbush near Banon.
- (West) African Thrush *Turdus pelios*. Small numbers in woodland, *Anogeissus*, riparian forest.
- Forest Robin *Stiphrornis erythrothorax*. One heard in dry forest between the rest camp and the gate at Tobé.

- Snowy-headed Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*. Local in Kouffé and Tobé (thickets). The bird near the hill at Tobé imitated in its song the song of Cuckoo Hawk and Freckled Nightjar!
- Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. One in Kouffé in small clearing in woodland (12 & 14 Apr). One just outside Tobé, in a farm (16 Apr).
- African Moustached Warbler *Melocichla mentalis*. Some in rank grass on the main road; in woodland in Kouffé, singing after the night storm on 14 Apr (only calling before that).
- Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*. A few in transition woodland, partial to *Anogeissus* (both sites).
- Green-backed Eremomela *Eremomela pusilla*. Common in woodland in Kouffé. Juveniles feeding themselves but still begging, 13 Apr.
- Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens*. In riparian forest and thickets at both sites; also in the tall patch of forest north-east of Adjiro river (Kouffé).
- Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura*. Local in Kouffé, e.g. in a party in *Anogeissus-Acacia*.
- Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. Several in woodland, *Anogeissus* and other transition woodland at both sites.
- Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*. Large numbers in woodland and transition woodland at both sites, dozens encountered in minutes of slow walking through the transition woodland at Tobé on 15-16 Apr. Probably hundreds present in one km². Many in song.
- Green Hylia *Hylia prasina*. One heard in thicket below Tobé rock.
- Rufous Cisticola *Cisticola rufus*. Appears common in Kouffé, as found in two or three places in woodland, located from their thin high calls. Not yet singing.
- Rock-loving Cisticola *Cisticola aberrans*. Seen and calling in low scrub on Tobé rock (RJD).
- Whistling Cisticola *Cisticola lateralis*. A few in rank woodland, Kouffé (few songs).
- Singing Cisticola *Cisticola cantans*. Local in woodland (Kouffé) and scrub on the main road north of Savalou.
- Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*. Widespread, in woodland, edge of dam, farms...
- Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythroptera*. Kouffé: local, in woodland.
- Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*. Common throughout, any thickets. Common also in cashew plantations near Banon.
- Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*. A few in woodland, edge of thicket, *Anogeissus*, both sites. Male in full breeding dress on 14 Apr.
- Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*. A few in woodland, edge of forest, *Anogeissus*, both sites.
- Lead-coloured Flycatcher *Myioparus plumbeus*. One singing in transition woodland, Kouffé.
- Senegal Batis *Batis senegalensis*. Common in Kouffé woodland; one female begging from male (incubation stage) 14 Apr.
- Common Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea*. Local in Kouffé, one singing in transition woodland.
- African Paradise Flycatcher *Tersiphone viridis*. Kouffé: a few in woodland or *Anogeissus*. Tobé: in forest and transition woodland. Some males in red-and-black morph, others with white in tail.
- Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer*. Found only in Kouffé, in forest on the Adjiro river.
- Puvel's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puveli*. One heard in the forest on the spring below the rock at Tobé, giving the series of descending whistles.
- White-winged Black Tit *Parus leucomelas guineensis*. One pair in woodland just outside Kouffé reserve, edge of a farm (with dead trees).
- Northern Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes longuemarei*. One male in a party in rich woodland, Kouffé.
- Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris*. Common in forest both sites, also in farmbrush in cashew near Banon.
- Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea*. In riparian forest at both sites.
- Green-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia verticalis*. Common in riparian forest and thickets at both sites, also in forest patch north-east of Adjiro river. On flowers of *Berlinia grandiflora*.
- Olive-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia chloropygia*. One singing in riparian thickets in a lush section on the Zou stream at Tobé.
- Copper Sunbird *Nectarinia cuprea*. In woodland in Kouffé; scrub edge of dam near Agbon.
- Splendid Sunbird *Nectarinia coccinigaster*. Throughout, woodland and riparian vegetation.
- Yellow White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis*. In woodland and *Anogeissus* at both sites (rarer Tobé).

- African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus*. Common (and noisy) in woodland in Kouffé, rare at Tobé (seen taking fruits of *Lannea barteri*).
- Yellow-billed Shrike *Corvinella corvina*. Near the dam at Agbon.
- Brubru *Nilaus afer*. In woodland in Kouffé.
- Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis*. Widespread, forest and thickets, both sites and near Agbon.
- Marsh Tchagra *Tchagra minuta*. One heard in thick regrowth between cashew farms, near Banon.
- Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*. Local in woodland (Agbon, Kouffé).
- Grey-headed Bush Shrike *Malaconotus blanchoti*. In woodland or wooded grassland near Agbon and in Kouffé.
- White Helmet Shrike *Prionops plumatus*. One group in woodland in Kouffé; one group also in cashew plantation (with a few native trees) near Banon.
- Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*. Uncommon in Kouffé (woodland), including one pair finishing a nest (in the fork of an *Anogeissus*, 20 m high), both adults sitting in it in alternation, 13 Apr. One heard distantly from the rock at Tobé.
- Lesser Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chloropterus*. Some near the dam near Agbon.
- Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*. One singing in wooded grassland at the dam near Agbon.
- Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*. In some villages north of Savalou.
- Bush Petronia *Petronia superciliaris*. A few in woodland in Kouffé.
- Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*. Widespread in villages, at the dam near Agbon. A few old nests in a *Mitragyna* in a small depression (later to be flooded) near the river in Kouffé.
- Red-headed Quelea *Quelea erythrops*. A few in grassland in a clearing in Kouffé.
- Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullata*. In open habitats, dam near Agbon, Kouffé.
- Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus*. Locally common in woodland in Kouffé.

Discussion

Almost nothing was known about the avifauna of Monts Kouffé and Agoua region. A few species from an unpublished report by Arthur Green and Jeff Sayer are included in Claffey (1995) for Monts Kouffé. For instance they recorded both Brown-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes cylindricus* and Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill *B. subcylindricus*, the first being qualified as "abundant". These are evidently errors, as Piping Hornbill (which is common in Kouffé) was not identified, and is only included as "rare" from Bassila (see note 27 in Claffey 1995: 77). Brown-cheeked Hornbill has still not been found in Benin by any experienced observer and being a species of Upper Guinea rain forest *sensu stricto*, it is unlikely to be present. A single record from the savanna region in Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996) also appears doubtful. A few other species may be correct, but the area where Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* was located is not indicated. Crested Guinea fowl *Guttera pucherani*, Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*, Standard-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis* and Fanti Saw-wing *Psaldiprocne obscura* are also listed, without details. The identification of glossy starlings (such as *L. chalcurus*) is tricky, so is best left in need of confirmation.

The range limits of several species associated with rain forest or transition woodland have now been extended north to Tobé/Kouffé: White-spotted Flufftail, Yellowbill, Black-throated Coucal, Narina's Trogon (greatly under-recorded in Bénin), Baumann's Greenbul, Grey-headed Bristlebill, Forest Robin, Green Crombec, Green Hylia, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher (recorded by Claffey 1995 for the Bétérou area, but identity uncertain as he failed to record African Paradise), Puvel's Illadopsis and Olive-bellied Sunbird. In the case of Narina's Trogon, Baumann's Greenbul, Grey-headed Bristlebill and Forest Robin, this is quite a jump from the Lama forest, but there may be intermediate populations in forest remnants near Savalou (as on the Agbado river) or west of Abomey (Kouffo river), for instance.

Conversely, some species of savanna woodland observed in Kouffé have not been recorded any further south at present: White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, White-winged Black Tit and Brubru. Yellow White-eye, curiously absent from southern Bénin, is not recorded south of Tobé at present. Tobé is also the southern limit for Spotted Thick-knee.

The observation of Crowned Eagle at Tobé, on the edge of Agoua forest, shows that this big raptor could survive in large reserves of transition woodland and not just rain forest, as supposed in 2009. More records may come to light, although our record at the Lama in 2009 was apparently of a wanderer.

2. Niaouli and Lama forests

For a description of the environment, see our 2009 report. The Lama forest appears well protected, except that hunting takes place on a regular basis. We heard shots, and saw a poacher with a gin-trap (on layon 15). However, Mona and Green Monkeys are so common and even tame that we suspect they are not the main target of hunters.

Additional species recorded in 2011:

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Niaouli: one heard at night (rest house) 11 Apr.

Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*. Lama: one pair flying at dusk near layon 15, 23 Apr; and one near layon 12 (same?) on 25 Apr. These are new records for the forest.

Western Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba iriditorques*. We had a very possible sighting of two in flight over Niaouli in Feb 2009. Now confirmed, with one bird singing briefly in plateau forest on 11 Apr, not heard on our later visit, but one singing regularly in bas-fond on 20 Apr. This is a first record for Niaouli, as van den Akker (2003) did not report it. Also found in the Lama, but far from common (21-27 Apr): two, 500 m apart, singing in teaks opposite the forest (near layon 15), and singles singing near layons 11 and 12 respectively. It is likely that numbers were reduced because of the lack of fruiting in the dominant tree species (no *Diospyros*, *Dialium* or *Mimusops* were in fruit, although the latter were flowering in Feb 2009, thus could have been expected to produce fruit by Apr). Waltert & Muhlenberg (1999) had found this pigeon "frequent" in the rains of 1998. The first report for Bénin came from Holyoak & Seddon (1990) who saw one bird in teaks in Nov 1988. They give no locality but their coordinates indicate that this was in the Agrimé section of the Lama forest; teak plantations are dominant there, but there are a few small patches of forest.

Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus*. Lama: one singing in *Acacia* savanna near the firebreak, 22 Apr. No previous Lama record.

Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus*. Lama: none heard in Feb 2009, but noisy 21-27 Apr. Heard on all layons visited. This is in the (virtual) absence of orioles and bush shrikes, among the more regular host species. It is certainly more common than the impression given by Waltert & Muhlenberg (1999), who had only two records.

Common (European Grey) Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*. Lama: one on layon 12, 26 Apr (a big cuckoo, with yellow at the base of the bill). A new record.

African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*. Lama: in Feb 2009 its song was heard imitated by the local Fraser's Forest Flycatcher; in Apr one singing irregularly on each layon visited (11, 12 and 15).

Didric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*. Several singing in the Lama forest.

Blue-headed Coucal *Centropus monachus*. Lama: one pair heard and seen in thickets and grass in a swampy area near the main road (in front of layon 15), 23 Apr.

Mottled Swift *Tachymarptis aequatorialis*. Passage seen over Kouffé/Tobé etc. mid-Apr continued with some flying over Niaouli on 18 Apr (at least 3, evening), and about 50 on 19 Apr at 17h!

European (Common) Swift *Apus apus*. Some passing over Niaouli in Apr.

[Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Campephaga phoenicea*. One female seen by J. Merz on layon 15, 23 Apr]

Red-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda syndactylus*. Lama: we had failed to find this species in Feb 2009, despite much tape playback in the right places (on layon 12). More efforts in Apr 2011 produced only one bird, morning of 26 Apr, giving a subsong and a few calls. Was glimpsed once (evening of same day, same place). We continue to think that the habitat appears unsuitable in the dry season, and wonder whether this species could have movements. All previous records were in the rains (see 2009 report).

Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus*. We failed to find this species at Niaouli bas-fond in 2009, but on 20 Apr 2011 one was calling in densest forest in bas-fond (across the stream). Presumably wanders this far occasionally from other swamp forest in the region.

Whistling Cisticola *Cisticola lateralis*. Lama: in savanna just outside the firebreak, calling and singing. Not a

surprising record, but this appears to be new, and the most southerly record to date.

Copper Sunbird *Nectarnia cuprea*. Lama: common in savanna near firebreak, also in more open areas on layon 15.

Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens*. Lama: we had no records in 2009, but this time heard one in a bird party on layon 12 (26 Apr). Red-headed Malimbe *M. rubricollis* was also more in evidence than in 2009, singing in two separate places (layons 11 and 12).

Notes on other, selected species

Cassin's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus africanus*. First discovered in Bénin in the Lama in 2009, this species was heard again on layon 12 on 25 Apr (two songs, 11h45). The very large nest seen on layon 11 in a *Ceiba* in 2009 (that perhaps belonged to this species) had collapsed.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*. Lama: more widespread than in Feb 2009, singing on most layons.

Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii*. Normally a dry-season visitor, with some still present in Apr. One at Niaouli on 19 Apr (singing very briefly), one at Lama 21 Apr and 26 Apr. Waltert & Muhlenberg (1999) saw one on 28 Apr, but none later.

Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis nigriscapularis*. About to fall silent at this time of year, none heard in Niaouli, but still one singing briefly and alarm-calling near our camp site in the Lama on 21 Apr; none heard after that. No other nightjars were seen or heard at the Lama, not even near the firebreak. Long-tailed Nightjar *C. climacurus* was still singing near the rest house at Niaouli.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*. As in 2009, rare at Niaouli, with one heard briefly (incomplete song) on 21 Apr (plateau). Hardly singing at the Lama (on 26 Apr), but two singles calling near layon 15 and in dense forest on layon 12. Only one Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis* in the Lama, at the firebreak, as in 2009.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*. Passage petered out over Niaouli on 19 Apr. Thus at this latitude spring passage lasts for about two months.

Rosy Bee-eater *Merops malimbicus*. Two birds heard and seen flying east over Niaouli on 10 Apr (16h) were the last of the season.

Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis*. Only one pair located at Niaouli (bas-fond) and none in the Lama. Greatly outnumbered by Broad-billed Roller *E. glaucurus*. This is even less than in 2009, and this forest species may eventually be eliminated by its congener.

Least Honeyguide *Indicator exilis*. Three heard in Niaouli in Feb 2009, down to one in Apr (same area). Lama: still one singing near layon 15, as in 2009.

(West) African Thrush *Turdus pelios*. Much less in evidence than in Feb 2009, only one noted edge of forest at Niaouli, and at Lama present in some teaks and near firebreak.

Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*. Perhaps mainly an off-season migrant, but still widespread at Niaouli (calling and singing), and several encountered in the Lama until our last day (27 Apr). All the more surprising that Waltert & Muhlenberg (1999) do not list it for the Lama, as they were in the field from mid-April.

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*. Very quiet at Niaouli in Apr (only a couple calling or singing), but very noisy in the Lama, with pair mating on 26 Apr.

Fraser's Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria ocreata*. Incredibly local in the Lama, as the only pair seen (and heard) was in exactly the same spot as in 2009 (layon 12).

Red-cheeked Wattle-eye *Dyaphorophya blissetti*. Discovered in Bénin in the Lama on layon 15, this species was also heard on layon 11, and was far more noisy on layon 15 in Apr than in Feb.

Paradise Flycatchers *Tersiphona* spp. The situation with African and Red-bellied is very complicated. Numbers of African (a partial intra-African migrant) had obviously decreased in Niaouli, compared to our Jan-Feb 2009 visit. However, both species were found side by side in several places in April (Niaouli and Lama), often in the same parties. The possibility of hybridization should be looked into.

Puvel's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puveli*. Niaouli: evidently a rare bird here, with only one heard once in 2009, and still only one singing this time (edge of noyau central), giving the series of downward whistles (21 Apr).

Forest Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus fulgidus*. Female of a pair nest-building in Niaouli plateau forest, in a broken branch of a live *Antiaris*, 11 Apr; a flock of 6 at bas-fond.

Summary of species ringed and retrapped 2009 and 2011

	Lama		Lokoli	Niaouli	Pobè
	2009	2011	2009	2009	2009
<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Ceyx pictus</i>	-	-	1	-	-
<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>	-	-	1	-	-
<i>Merops albicollis</i>	-	-	3	-	-
<i>Andropadus virens</i>	4	12	2 (1) ¹	6 (3)	3 (1)
<i>Andropadus curvirostris</i>	2	1	-	1	-
<i>Chlorocichla simplex</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Phyllastrephus baumanni</i>	4	1	-	-	-
<i>Phyllastrephus albigularis</i>	4	8	-	2 (1)	-
<i>Bleda canicapillus</i>	3	5	-	1	-
<i>Turdus pelios</i>	-	-	2	-	-
<i>Stiphornis erythrothorax</i>	2	6	-	1	-
<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i>	-	1	-	2	-
<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>	2	1	1	-	-
<i>Camaroptera chloronota</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Dyaphorophyia blissetti</i>	1	-	-	-	-
<i>Dyaphorophyia castanea</i>	-	-	-	1	1 (1)
<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>	-	3	-	-	-
<i>Illadopsis fulvescens</i>	-	3	-	-	-
<i>Illadopsis puveli</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Anthreptes collaris</i>	1	-	2	1	-
<i>Nectarinia olivacea</i>	3	9	-	15 (1)	10
<i>Prionops plumatus</i>	-	1	-	-	-
<i>Malimbus nitens</i>	-	-	-	1	-
<i>Spermophaga haematina</i>	-	1	3	-	-
Totals	26	57	15 (1)	31 (5)	14 (2)

¹In brackets are the numbers of retraps of birds ringed in previous years by M. van den Akker, included in the totals.

Species confirmed at Niaouli by J. and S. Merz

The observers (pers. comm. and *in litt.*) have visited Niaouli on five occasions between 2005 and 2010, usually for a day or two at a time. They are able to confirm the following species which we have not recorded ourselves: Narina's Trogon *Apaloderma narina*, seen in the plateau forest (Jan 2007, Feb 2010); Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps*, a group seen once (5 Nov 2007) on the edge of the *Senna* reconstructed forest, not typical habitat and almost certainly wanderers; and Tit-hylia *Pholidornis ruschiae* seen on two occasions in the plateau forest (Jan 2005, Feb 2010).

Comments on seasonality

In 2009 our impression was that singing frequency had increased in several species from early to late February, especially at the Lama. By late Apr 2011, most species at the Lama seemed ready to breed, with all cuckoos in song (Thick-billed, Black, Emerald, Klaas's and Didric). Narina's Trogons were very noisy (until at least mid-day hours); White-spotted Flufftail and Olive-green Camaroptera (two species partial to moist understorey,

hardly calling in 2009) were heard in more places; Forest Robins and both species of *Illadopsis* were counter-singing vigorously for up to two hours in the morning, etc. This impression is confirmed by breeding records obtained at the Lama by Waltert & Muhlenberg in late April-early May (brood patches observed in White-throated Greenbul, Grey-headed Bristlebill, Western Nicator, Forest Robin, Green Crombec, Puvel's *Illadopsis*, Collared Sunbird). The one obvious exception concerns Green Hylia, of which we heard none in nearly a week.

At Niaouli, however, the situation appeared quite different, with fewer species active in Apr than in Feb (with the exception of Bronze-naped Pigeon). No cuckoos were heard, not even Klaas's. Green Turacos were almost silent. Honeyguide Greenbul was heard only once in four days. Camaropteras were almost silent (no Yellow-browed was heard this time, and Olive-green was still not heard). Black-winged Orioles were less noisy than in Feb. Negrofinches were also very quiet, Chestnut-breasted completely so. On the other hand, Forest Robins, Green Hylia and various bulbuls were noisy (especially *Andropadus* species).

The situation appears rather complex, but there is little doubt that there are significant differences in breeding activity between the avifaunas of the two forest sites, only 25 km distant!

Unfortunately we made no progress on the question of African Pitta *Pitta angolensis* and African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis* described to us from the Lama in 2009. Tape playback of Broadbill was tried in several places, to no avail. The area was still too dry for Pittas to have become active.

3. Floodplains of the Sô and Zou

3.1. Sô plain.

On 8 Apr Peter Neuenschwander introduced us to **Zinvié** fish farm and Sitatunga "reserve". We looked around the marsh in the evening and early morning, but apart from several pairs of Blue-headed Coucals *Centropus monachus*, there was little to report. A pair of Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* occupied a nest hole in a stump of Coconut and mated on 8 Apr; a Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* carried food to a nest in a *Piptadeniastrum* in Zinvié "forest" (which consists of a few very large forest trees, witness of the forest of the past). We reached a large patch of swamp forest at **Lanzron**, too late to hear the dawn chorus. Among birds noted in that area, it is worth mentioning Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris* and Western Nicator *N. chloris*. Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* and Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* were singing outside.

The floodplain at **Takli** has been the object of some bird research by Pierre Gauzère, student from Perpignan University. Typical bird species of this habitat (seasonally flooded grassland, fields, muddy banks and low bush edge of pans) recorded on our brief visit (9 Apr) include Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* and Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*, Allen's Gallinule *Porphyryla alleni*, Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostris*, African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (three), Forbes's Plover *Charadrius forbesi*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Black and Blue-headed Coucals *Centropus grillii* and *C. monachus*, Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*, Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus*, Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*, Moustached Warbler *Melocichla mentalis*, Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*, Winding Cisticola *Cisticola galactotes*, Copper Sunbird *N. cuprea*, Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris*, Pin-tailed Widow *Vidua macroura*. Ethiopian Swallows *Hirundo aethiopica* live in the village of Takli, with also Common Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea* in a *Senna* (ex-*Cassia*) plantation.

3.2. Zou plain

We visited the floodplain of **Domè** with Bruno Portier and Wouter Plomp on the morning of 17 Apr. This area is already well known (B. Portier), so a full list is not presented. We spent most of our time in the seasonally wet grassland, with scattered tree clumps. There is some swamp or riparian forest further. Birds of interest included an adult Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*, two Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, both Black *Cuculus clamosus* and Thick-billed Cuckoos *Pachycoccyx audeberti* singing in riparian vegetation, both Violet *Musophaga*

violacea (riparian) and Green Turacos *Tauraco persa*, both Red-shouldered *Campephaga phoenicea* and Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrikes *C. quiscalina*, Yellow-throated Leaflove *Chlorocichla flavicollis* (tree clumps), Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythroptera*, three cisticola warblers (*C. galactotes*, *erythroptera* and *brachypterus*), Pale Flycatcher *Bradornis pallidus* in scattered trees, Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike *Malaconotus sulfureopectus* (tree clumps), Tropical Boubou *Laniarius aethiopicus* as well as Yellow-crowned Gonolek *Laniarius barbarus*, good numbers of Marsh Tchagra *Tchagra minuta* in the wet grassland, and a Parasitic Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis* in non-breeding dress (RJD) — possibly the first record for Bénin. As at Takli, the coucals present were Black (in intermediate dress) and Blue-headed. Moustached Warbler and Bronze Mannikin were seen nest-building.

On a brief stop-over at the bridge over the **Zou marsh** (road to Kétou), a pair of Forest Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus fulgidus* was located, a new locality.

4. Coastal area

4.1. Drabo Gbo (Ouèga)

Morning walks in Peter Neuenschwander's forest and surroundings produced a few more species than in 2009, such as Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* (singing 10 Apr), Didric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* (first song on 8 Apr), Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri* (around a large Baobab), Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris* (very local, thickets), Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer*, Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea* (forest) and Olive-bellied Sunbird *N. chloropygia* (field). Numbers of African Paradise Flycatcher *T. viridis* had decreased but the species was still present (P.N.). African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro* was particularly vocal in the morning, on the other hand Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis nigriscapularis* had gone silent (5-8 Apr). A Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii* gave a loud song on 8 Apr (but presumably a migrant). Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* was still present; whether this species breeds locally (normally in sand bank) remains to be investigated. A pair of Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis* were investigating the infructescences of *Pithecellobium dulce* and *Acacia auriculiformis* (both exotics), apparently to take the arillate seeds.

4.2. Pahou forest

Despite the name, the forest of Pahou is closer to Ouidah than Pahou, being west of the village of Ahozon. It is the last remnant of coastal semi-evergreen rain forest in Bénin. How big it was originally is impossible to tell, but it must have covered many square km. Today, the forest reserve consists mainly of plantations (especially *Acacia auriculiformis*, an Australian exotic), and the remnant of natural forest is in the shape of a triangle. It is situated to the north of the main road, and is signposted with a "sentier écotouristique". In all the forest covers about 100 ha (measured on a clear aerial photograph provided by B. Portier). Thus it is slightly larger than Niaouli plateau forest. A major distinction is that the canopy is closed in undisturbed sections, thus with sheltered understorey. There are no streams.

We spent about three hours in the early morning (10 Apr), and had breakfast near the edge. We were accompanied by B. Portier. Such a short visit can only produce an incomplete list, which is given in full: African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro*, Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*, Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer* (edges), Tambourine Dove *T. tympanistris*, African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus*, Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster*, Yellowbill *Ceuthmochares aereus*, Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*, Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*, Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *P. bilineatus*, Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens*, Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *A. curvirostris*, Simple Leaflove *Chlorocichla simplex* (edges), Leaflove *Pyrrhurus scandens*, White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis*, Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapilla*, Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*, Western Nicator *Nicator chloris*, Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*, Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens*, Grey Longbill *Macrosphenus concolor*, Brown Illadopsis *Illadopsis fulvescens*, Collared Sunbird *Anthreptes collaris*, Olive Sunbird *Nectarinia olivacea*, Olive-bellied Sunbird *N. chloropygia* (edges), Splendid Sunbird *N. coccinigaster*,

Sabine's Puffback *Dryoscopus sabini* (several pairs in canopy, singing and reacting to tape playback), Square-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus ludwigii* (several pairs, tape-recorded), Forest Chestnut-winged Starling *Onychognathus fulgidus* (one pair flew over), Splendid Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis splendidus*, Black-necked Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis* (edges), Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis*.

In the nearby *Acacia* plantation with small thickets we also recorded Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*, Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*, Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus*, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus*, Common Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea*, Copper Sunbird *Nectarinia cuprea*, Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis*, Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*... Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* was seen near the road, and again on 29 Apr.

Discussion. Several of the forest species were recorded for the first time in the coastal area: White-throated Greenbul and Grey-headed Bristlebill, Grey Longbill, Brown Illadopsis, Sabine's Puffback and Forest Chestnut-winged Starling were not known any nearer than Niaouli forest, 35 km to the north. The population of Sabine's Puffback must be more important than in Niaouli, where indeed it does not seem to be viable in isolation. This implies inter-forest movements.

African Goshawk, Tambourine Dove, Black-throated Coucal, Cameroon Sombre Greenbul and Olive Sunbird are known from smaller patches to the north, such as Drabo Gbo, 20 km to the north-east. Rather more surprising was the discovery of a small population of Leaflove and Square-tailed Drongo, as these are absent from the open-canopy forests of Niaouli, Pobé and Lama, as well as swamp forest at Lokoli. Leaflove does not reappear before the dry forests of the Tobé/Agoua region (including gallery forest at Kpataba, B. Portier *in litt.*), just north of 8°N. Square-tailed Drongo is found in riparian forest in Ouari Maro, south to the level of Agbassa (8°49'N), although there is a possible record near Abomey (B. Portier *in litt.*).

4.3. Grand-Popo

We spent one night at the Auberge of Grand-Popo (28/29 Apr), and birded for a few hours along the fragment of mangrove, mouth of the Mono and the beach, and behind the auberge (gardens, stream with thickets, grassland beyond the bridge). There is no riparian forest on the Mono, but some palm and coconut plantations on the opposite bank, with small thickets. This is in a "poor" square, so the full list is given:

Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*, Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (one of the African race, mangrove), Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (one), Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*, Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*, Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (one), White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migrans*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra*, Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis* (heard at night), White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* (one giving a distraction display on the beach), Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Vinaceous Dove *S. vinacea*, Red-eyed Dove *S. semitorquata*, Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer*, African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus*, W. Grey Plantain-eater *Crinifer piscator*, Didric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*, Blue-headed Coucal *Centropus monachus*, Senegal Coucal *C. senegalensis*, African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*, Little Swift *Apus affinis*, Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*, Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*, Woodland Kingfisher *H. senegalensis*, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis*, Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus*, Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivosa* (one seen in thickets near the small stream, RJD), Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica*, Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*, African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp*, Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus*, Yellow-throated Leaflove *Chlorocichla flavicollis* (mangrove), Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*, West African Thrush *Turdus pelios*, Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla*, Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens* (opposite bank of Mono), Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* (one in Neem), Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, Red-faced Cisticola *C. erythropus*, Singing Cisticola *C. cantans* (dry garden), Winding Cisticola *C. galactotes*, Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*, Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura*, Oriole-Warbler *Hyper-*

gerus atriceps (mangrove), Common Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea* (hotel grounds), Blue Flycatcher *Elminia longicauda* (a pair in a patch of Neem opposite the auberge!), Brown Babbler *Turdoides plebejus* (thickets near stream), Green-headed Sunbird *Nectarinia verticalis*, Carmelite Sunbird *N. fuliginosa* (hotel grounds, including *Casuarina* trees), Variable Sunbird *N. venusta*, Splendid Sunbird *N. coccinigaster*, Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris*, Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*, Yellow-crowned Gonolek *Laniarius barbarus*, Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*, Slender-billed Weaver *Ploceus pelzelni* (several at old nests edge of stream, in spiny *Drepanocarpus lunatus*), Black-necked Weaver *P. nigricollis*, Orange Weaver *P. aurantius* (nest-building in *Drepanocarpus lunatus*, edge of mangrove), Village Weaver *P. cucullatus*, Bar-breasted Firefinch *Lagonosticta rufopicta*, Red-billed Firefinch *L. senegala*, Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullata*, Wilson's Indigobird *Vidua wilsoni* (in full breeding dress, one pair and another male, singing on wires, and also feeding with Bar-breasted Firefinches on the ground), Pin-tailed Widow (or Whydah) *Vidua macroura* (in full breeding dress).

Several species of interest above, especially Buff-spotted Woodpecker, a completely new locality of a bird hardly known in Bénin. The Blue Flycatcher, first noted by J. & S. Merz, is a long way from the nearest population (Ouari Maro), and may not hang around for much longer in the area, as several trees were being cut for a garden. It is unknown from the coast of Togo (Cheke & Walsh 1996). Wilson's (or Pale-winged) Indigobird in full breeding dress in late April was particularly early.

BRIEF NOTES ON MAMMALS

We are concerned here only with additions to our observations of 2009. Thomas's Galago *Galagoides thomasi* was heard at a new locality, at Zinvié. There was a noisy pair at dawn around the mirador, in palm thicket.

The noisy nocturnal hyrax *Dendrohyrax* sp. heard so frequently in the forests of the south (Niaouli, Lama, Lokoli) was also heard in Kouffé on the Adjiro, and at Tobé. The Tobé rock also has a population of Rock Hyrax *Procavia ruficeps kerstingi*, which called during the day. This is the first opportunity we had of comparing the voice of the two hyraxes and they are distinctive, the *Procavia* giving series of two or three loud *tcha: keeah-tcha, keeah-tcha, tcha-tcha-tcha...* (three calls per second). The voice of *Dendrohyrax* sp. is even more complex, with snorts and series of coughs increasing in volume (cf. tape-recordings, 2009).

The observation of a Giant Squirrel *Protoxerus stangeri* in riparian forest on the Zou at Tobé was unexpected. The animal was seen at a distance of a few metres for several minutes, as it was resting on a tree.

CONCLUSION

This visit has clarified the status of several species in the forests of Niaouli and the Lama (e.g. cuckoos, Bronzenaped Pigeon), although clearly April is still too early for some species to have become vocally active. The Pahou forest on the coast proved to be especially interesting and further surveys are needed. Many new distribution records, especially of forest birds, were obtained for the little-known areas of Monts Kouffé and Tobé (Agoua). These suggest that small forest patches between the better-known Lama forest and Kouffé could also produce interesting records (e.g. forest on the Agbado river near Savalou, on the Kouffo river west of Abomey). Forest remnants to the north of Kouffé, especially near Bassila and Pénessoulou (9°15'N on the Togo border) should also be investigated.

Within the floodplain of the lower Ouémé *sensu lato*, some large patches of swamp forest were seen too briefly for surveys, but definitely deserve more attention: these include Lanzron forest, within the Siatunga reserve of Zinvié, and also the patch near Gbègon. The latter is still extensive, although away from water forest trees have been destroyed completely. There is no sign of any savanna vegetation in this area, and our reservations concerning the Bioko Batis *Batis poensis* that Brunel probably collected in the 1950s (but lost since) may have been unfounded (cf. Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2009, Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 2011). However, there is no habitat left for this species today.

April was a good month for spring passage of Palaearctic species, including Red-footed Falcon (11-15 Apr), Common (European Grey) Cuckoo (11-26 Apr), European Bee-eaters, swifts and swallows, and Wood Warbler (of which thousands literally dropped from the sky around the middle of the month, a phenomenon also

witnessed by B. Portier near Savalou). Among intra-African migrants breeding in the Sahel, White-throated Bee-eaters had started to move by mid-April at the level of Kouffé, and there was remarkable passage of Mottled Swifts over a wide area (at least Kouffé to Niaouli) from 12-19 Apr, with up to 50 birds in a group. J. Gonin (unpubl. report) saw at least 40 in the Pendjari on 17 Nov 2010. Where do these come from, if as we suspect most do not winter in Bénin? Are there some hidden winter quarters in Central Africa? They were usually flying in a north-westerly direction.

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Appendix 1. Coordinates of main localities cited

Agbon (dam)	8°13'N, 1°58'E
Domè (Zou floodplain)	7°04'N, 2°20'E
Drabo Gbo (Ouèga)	6°30'N, 2°18'E
Gbègon	7°17'N, 2°29'E
Grand-Popo (Auberge)	6°17'N, 1°50'E
Lama forest (camp site near layon 15)	6°59'N, 2°05'E
Lanzron forest	6°38'N, 2°23'E
Monts Kouffé (camp site near the Adjiro stream)	8°32'N, 1°58'E
Niaouli plateau	6°44'N, 2°08'E
Niaouli bas-fond	6°45'N, 2°08'E
Pahou forest	6°23'N, 2°10'E
Takli (Sô floodplain)	6°36'N, 2°23'E
Tobé farm	8°19'N, 1°50'E
Zinvié	6°37'N, 2°21'E

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